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INFO RUCNMGH/MAGHREB COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L TUNIS 000650

SIPDIS

NEA/MAG (NARDI AND HARRIS)

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/16/2018  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [KPAO](#) [TS](#)  
SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR PROVIDES FM WITH NON-PAPER ON IMPROVING  
FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

REF: TUNIS 444

Classified By: Ambassador Robert F. Godec for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) In a tete-a-tete meeting with the Foreign Minister on June 16, the Ambassador delivered a non-paper on steps the GOT could take to improve freedom of expression in Tunisia. Noting the White House statement on World Press Freedom Day that referenced Tunisia's problems with freedom of expression, the Ambassador stressed the importance that Washington attaches to progress in this area. He indicated that Washington would welcome tangible progress, privately or publicly, as appropriate. Alluding to one such positive development, Abdallah pointed out that representatives from Human Rights Watch (HRW) are currently in Tunisia to negotiate the terms under which HRW could conduct prison visits. The Ambassador responded that the USG would respond favorably if such an agreement is concluded.

¶2. (C) The Ambassador raised the specific issue of email filtering, pointing to the Embassy's own experience with this problem. Specifically, he said, the consular section sends a bi-monthly email to American citizens to inform them of consular services. Unfortunately, there have been numerous reports of these emails arriving with altered messages. Foreign Minister Abdallah took the Ambassador's point that the Embassy needs to have reliable and unfiltered access to American citizens in Tunisia and undertook to look into the matter.

¶3. (C) The non-paper, the text of which has been shared by email with NEA/MAG, covered the following areas:

- Granting new media licenses to independent newspapers, radio, and television;
- Predictable and reasonable media access for opposition parties;
- Allowing access to non-violent and non-pornographic websites that are currently blocked in Tunisia (e.g., YouTube);
- Ceasing filtering of or tampering with emails;
- Taking proactive measures to ensure that past problems with newspaper distribution do not recur; and
- Allowing journalists equal access to media events and ensuring that they are able to carry out their profession without harassment.

Please visit Embassy Tunis' Classified Website at:  
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/nea/tunis/index.cfm>  
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